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Chateau Argenteuil and its history

The story of Château Argenteuil began in 1832, when entrepreneur Ferdinand Meuus bought about 300 hectares of land financed through his bank, Société Générale. That same year, construction began on the castle. It would last until 1847.

During the time the castle was being built, there was also a road being built with the bank's money. It was a path through the woods, officially designed to facilitate the transport of coal from the mines in Charleroi to Brussels. The road, currently known as Avenue de Tervuren, went right past the newly constructed palace and came to be known as the "route de la Banque." Thus, we can well imagine what local people thought and felt about it.

The first chapter in the history of the castle was short. It was not even completely finished, when it burned down on the night of January 10, 1847. The fire destroyed all documents that could have told us anything from the first castle. All we have left are two paintings, one with the family in the garden behind the castle and one of the fire itself. Apparently, the fire was accidentally caused by workmen at the castle. It is said that Ferdinand was told about the fire during a gambling party in Brussels. He gave some orders to put out the fire and then he continued with his party. When they asked him if he would not go to Waterloo to check on the Castle, he replied that it was "hardly worthwhile." The artifacts that had not already been lost in the fire would in any case be gone before he got there to save anything.

It was decided almost immediately that a new castle would be built on the same site. The construction took place between 1856-1858 and was led by architect Cluysenaar. This is the same architect who designed Galerie St Hubert, the Conservatory of Music and the Ferme du Château de la Hulpe. He was widely regarded as one of the era's leading architects.

Ferdinand himself did not get much enjoyment from his newly built castle. He died in 1860. In his will, he left the Castle to his wife who in turn bequeathed the castle in 1874 to their tenth child, daughter Henriette. Unfortunately, there was no detailed inventory of this inheritance. Therefore, we know almost nothing about the furniture and the art that was in the castle at that time. What we do know is that the value of the wine cellar was six times greater than the value of the silver, and nine times greater than the value of the linen. The basement was under the current Mozart Hall. This area was used as storage for beer, fruit, vegetables and dry goods.

Henriette died unmarried and without heirs. She bequeathed the castle to a relative, Louis de Meeus. Upon his death, his estate was divided up between his wife and son. His son inherited Argenteuil. His wife would be the last named de Meeus to live at the castle. Upon her death in 1929, her children sold the castle and the 240 hectares of surrounding land (of which 165 hectares were forest) to a company named *SA Domaine d'Argenteuil*.

The following year, in 1930, this company sold 150 hectares to the American ambassador Mr. Tuck.



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The ambassador had a castle built in Louis XIV style and created a park. This castle was long known as the *Château Tuck*, but is now called *Domaine Royale d'Argenteuil*, and is on the other side of our wall. It was for many years home to Leopold and then his widow, Princess Lillian. There were rumors that the government was intending to sell it on the private market. The family de Meeus castle, Argenteuil and 20 hectares of land were sold altogether to a group of Carmelite nuns.

The nuns turned the castle into a monastery. Among other things, they changed the original chapel's appearance. In 1937, the nuns sold the castle and the grounds. This time the buyer was a company named Comil, owned by the Launoit family. At this same time, the company purchased all of the remaining land of the *Domaine d'Argenteuil*, ie everything except Tucks' domains.

For a few years the castle was used as a summer camp for children and during the war the German occupying forces took care of it. But in 1949, the domain was sold to the Belgian State. The state opened a domestic science school for girls in the castle and made radical changes to adapt the building to this new feature. The school, which was called the *Institut Normal Ménagère de l'Etat*, also built, in the mid-fifties, a school building with classrooms to the left of the castle, our current school building.

The Institute remained a technical school for girls and boys up to the end of the 1980s, when the translation school, ISTI and later the Scandinavian School took over the buildings.

Maybe you are interested in the castle's architecture? The castle for instance is built in “new styles.” The styles can be described as neo-Renaissance and neo-Baroque, although it is possible to find other new styles in the building. In the original building, there was previously a cast-iron and glass structure over the main entrance in a style that is inspired by the *Galerie St. Hubert*; fully demonstrating the great fondness for the combination of iron and glass. Cast iron was also used as a decoration element on the towers (now removed) and around the windows. Iron was also used instead of wood in load bearing structures on the interior, but they were hidden.

It took 1,5 million bricks from the brickworks in Ohain to build the castle. The bricks were then combined with *Pierres bleues* bricks from Feluy and *Pierre blanches* bricks from the neighborhood. The two floors were divided with a strip of *Pierres grises* bricks. Marble has also been used mainly in the great hall and on the stairs in the main entrance. All of the interior doors are made of oak.

Ulla Melchior
Former SSB teacher